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ABSTRACT

The Agriculture Education Department at California Polytechnic State University conducted a program to recruit Black and Hispanic students for the school's agriculture programs during spring 1988 and twice since then. High school sophomores and juniors in Los Angeles were invited to Cal Poly for a 26-hour program of workshops designed to include a blend of technology with hands-on experiences (including soil and water testing, irrigation technology, landscape design and installation, artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, tissue culture, computer simulations, food processing, and seed identification), tours of the library and off-campus housing, career discussions, and sessions with staff from the Placement Center and Student Academic Services. The students also participated in a barbecue in their honor and received stenciled T-shirts and a videotape of their experiences in program activities. According to their responses on a questionnaire, a majority of student participants expressed a desire to attend Cal Poly upon graduation. Questionnaire responses from teachers and a counselor who participated as chaperons were also favorable. Judging from their participation in the program, Cal Poly students are in support of the program, which offers them leadership experience. Resources for the 1990 program have been committed. Program modifications will include expansion of the targeted geographical area to include more school districts in the greater Los Angeles area; limitation of participants to 20 so as to not overtax resources; increased efforts to quell parental reluctance to allow children, especially Hispanic females, to participate; and the establishment of a similar program for high school counselors. (CML)

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26-HOURS AT CAL POLY: A RECRUITMENT STRATEGY TARGETING UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

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INTRODUCTION AND NEED

Demographic studies indicate that urban centers in California continue to grow at unprecedented rates. The concentration of Blacks and Hispanics in urban environments far exceeds the proportion of non-Hispanic Whites in these settings. The well-documented lack of participation of underrepresented groups (primarily Blacks and Hispanics) in programs leading to leadership positions in the agricultural industry has surfaced as a concern of monumental proportions in the State of California. Additionally, the increase in the minority segment of the population of the Southwest has led to a forecast of a "minority-majority" within the next two decades, further exacerbating an already difficult situation for agricultural educators.

The educational environment in the School of Agriculture at Cal Poly has been one of cooperation and cohesiveness among the faculty in the ten departments. The interest in recruiting students from underrepresented populations has long been established as a priority. Despite the concern in recruiting qualified underrepresented students, several factors have inhibited the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups in the School of Agriculture. Among the limiting factors are:

1. The proximity of urban centers with high minority numbers to San Luis Obispo presents a barrier of physical distance, approximating 200 miles. This particular concern surfaces when considering the concept of the extended family in the Hispanic culture.
2. Historically, minority groups employed in the agricultural industry have held positions of menial labor.

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3. Presently, the student population at Cal Poly consists of non-Hispanic Whites. With the lack of racial/ethnic representation throughout the university, the necessary peer identity and networking channels are not present.

4. A nominal number of faculty members and administrators from underrepresented groups poses a challenge in identifying role models of color.

5. The perception that agriculture encompasses a workforce of unskilled individuals in a climate of economic woes and uncertainty makes the study of non-agricultural subject matter majors much more appealing.

IDEA DESIGN

In serving the needs of agricultural education and in addressing a priority of the university, the Agricultural Education Department embarked on a program designed to stimulate the interest of underrepresented groups in the agricultural industry. Particular emphases were placed on educational opportunities in agriculture at postsecondary institutions and occupations in agriculture requiring a baccalaureate degree in agriculture. The "26 Hours at Cal Poly" program had its beginning in the Spring of 1988. Two sessions have been conducted since that time. The program was the direct outcome of a senior project developed by an undergraduate student supervised by faculty members in the Agricultural Education Department. The goal is to increase the enrollment of underrepresented groups, Hispanics and Blacks, in programs of agriculture at Cal Poly.

Initiating such a program required consensus and commitment from the administration, faculty, and students at Cal Poly, and the allocation of resources to provide the service to participants. Departments in the School of Agriculture volunteered their services and facilities. A group of students were assembled well in advance to plan the event under the supervision of a faculty member. A critical element was to ensure the involvement of minority students in planning the undertaking and in hosting the participants. A student chairperson was appointed and tasks identified.

The Agricultural Specialist for the Los Angeles Unified School District notified secondary schools and coordinated the selection process. The targeted grade levels for participation in the program were high school sophomores and juniors. Parents, instructors, and participants were contacted via correspondence and telephone calls to further explain the program and the operational aspects. The cost for transporting participants from Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo and back was the responsibility of Cal Poly; the cost of substitute teachers, for teachers serving as chaperones, was the responsibility of the school district. Icebreaker sessions occurred during the four-hour bus trip north. A team of students and a faculty member met the bus at the point of departure in Los Angeles.

Workshops were designed to involve the participants, rather than limit their exposure to "show-and-tell" sessions (typical of recruitment programs). Workshops were designed to include a blend of technology with hands-on experiences. Examples of workshops conducted included the following: soil and water testing, irrigation technology, landscape design and installation, artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, tissue culture, computer simulations, pregnancy testing, agricultural communications, dairy products technology, seed identification and selection, and food processing and conveyor systems. Discussions about career opportunities were infused throughout the 26 hours. Also, information packets were prepared in advance and distributed to the students upon their arrival.

Special sessions with representatives from the Placement Center, Student Academic Services, and the office of Relations With Schools were conducted. A tour of the library and a tour of on-campus student housing were incorporated into the schedule. The entire event was recorded on videotape.

The students were honored at a barbecue held prior to their departure time. Certificates of completion and stenciled tee shirts were presented to each participant at the gathering. Campus dignitaries were present at the event. Videotapes were edited, and the

edited product was presented to the students to share with parents, instructors, peers, counselors, etc.

RESULTS

The 26-Hour Program has been adopted by the School of Agriculture as a program with merit. The participants, faculty, and Cal Poly students involved have expressed support for the program. Financial resources and manpower for the 1990 program have been committed.

In assessing the outcome of the program to date, two evaluation instruments were developed and administered. One of the questionnaires was administered to students; the other questionnaire was administered to adult chaperones participating in the event. The adult chaperones consisted of teachers and a counselor. The reaction from the two groups was favorable. The majority of high school students participating in the program expressed a desire to attend Cal Poly upon graduation from high school.

The edited videotapes distributed to the participants have found their way into homes, offices, and classrooms throughout the service area of the district. Additional copies of the videotapes have been requested.

Follow-up studies of the students' postsecondary plans are to be conducted to determine the effect of the program on participants. Several participants are now in the junior and senior grade levels in high school. One participant in his senior year of high school in 1988 is now enrolled at Cal Poly.

Secondary benefits to the program have been many. The 26-Hours at Cal Poly Program required the enlistment of assistance from students at Cal Poly. The overwhelming enthusiasm from students in differing majors suggests that students are in support of the recruitment effort. The program has allowed for added leadership experiences for the many students involved. The cooperative nature of the entire program has strengthened relations among presenters and students.

The Public Affairs Officer for Cal Poly contacted the local news media. The coverage provided the School of Agriculture was extensive and positive.

PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS

The selection procedure has been the responsibility of the Agricultural Specialist for the Los Angeles Unified District. Interest in the program has grown to the point where an application process will be instituted. The distribution of applications will be the responsibility of the Agricultural Specialist, but the selection process will become the responsibility of Cal Poly. Additionally, the targeted area for participation in the program will be expanded to include more school districts within the greater Los Angeles area.

Even though attention was directed at assuring parents that their child would be under the supervision of a responsible adult while participating in the program, hesitation in allowing their son or daughter to participate persisted among parents, particularly Hispanic females. Intensive efforts to quell parental apprehension will be instituted in 1990.

The number of participants will be limited to accommodate the learn-by-doing philosophy. The program will continue to occur while the university is in session, thereby strengthening interaction between participants and students at Cal Poly. Therefore, the size of the group will be limited to twenty to avoid taxing available resources.

A counselor, serving as a chaperone during the 1989 26-Hours at Cal Poly urged the introduction of a similar program for high school counselors. The counselor's remarks supported previous discussions of the Agricultural Education Department. Therefore, the Agricultural Education Department has requested additional funding for a duplicate program for counselors in the greater Los Angeles area has been requested (and appears likely).

RESOURCES

The budget for the program was \$3,950. The Agricultural Education Department, Collegiate Future Farmers of America, participating departments, Los Angeles Unified School District, office of the Dean of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Education Foundation contributed funds to the program. Expenditures included bus transportation, lodging, food, videotapes, and film and developing. Other supplies and materials included the informational packets, certificates of completion, tee shirts, and departmental giveaways.

The success of the program rests with the human resources involved. Cooperation from the office of the Dean of Agriculture, Student Academic Services, Placement Center, offices of Relations With Schools and Public Affairs, faculty and students in the School of Agriculture, library personnel, and dormitory residents was necessary.